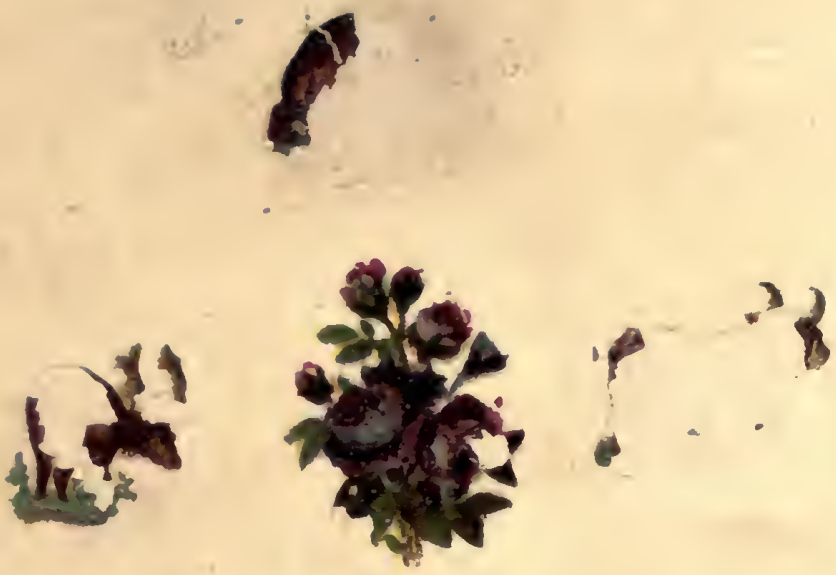

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"Kate had her arm around her waist, and was half dragging her along to where the excited group of girls stood." p. 115

MINNIE GRAY;

OR,

Merit Rewarded.

BY

ROSE PHILLIPS.

PHILADELPHIA:
JAMES S. CLAXTON,
SUCCESSOR TO WM. S. & ALFRED MARTIEN,
No. 1214 CHESTNUT STREET.

Entered accor ling to Act of Congress, in the year 1867, by
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MINNIE GRAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE GRAY FAMILY.

MARTIN GRAY, with his young bride, had early emigrated to one of our flourishing Western States, and selected for their future home a piece of land in the county of M——.

They commenced life on a small scale, but gradually their property increased in value; the county seat being located within a mile of the borders of their farm, and in a few years they were on the road to wealth and independence.

In the lapse of time two lovely daughters were born to them. They were out of debt, and had everything around them to make them comfortable, except that the house they lived in was getting old, but there was money enough laid away in the savings' bank to build a new one.

Mr. Gray had received a good common school education; was noble hearted and generous to a fault; nevertheless God prospered him. He had been blessed with one of the best of mothers, who had been left a widow, and endeavored to bring up her children in a strict observance of moral and religious principles. Her son became the subject of religious impressions, when only ten years old. As far

back as he could remember he had been accustomed to kneel morning and evening at the family altar, where every member of it except himself was a professed disciple of Christ. He had been born and bred in an atmosphere of prayer: saw the beauties of the Christian life daily exemplified in that of his cheerful, patient mother, yet he waited for some great manifestation of Divine power, in his own particular case, before he could become a follower of the lowly Jesus.

When they first came West, it was eighteen miles to the nearest church, and generally accompanied by his wife, he always made it a point to be there when he knew there was to be preaching. One Sabbath morning they were a little

late. He went in and took a seat by the door. That old familiar hymn commencing,

"Alas! and did my Saviour bleed,"

was given out. The singing affected him deeply, but he could not join in it, for his heart was too sad. The minister arose, and read the second chapter of Hebrews. Before he had finished, a ray of light seemed to burst in upon his darkened soul. The plan of salvation looked plain, yet he was afraid to be happy: afraid to hearken to the voice saying,

"Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool."

He carried his fresh convictions

home with him; constantly maintained daily prayer; tried to live a Christian, but still had no well-grounded hope. The following lines seemed to be engraved upon his heart, as if with a pen of iron. He could not banish them with the cares of the day, and dreamed of them at night:—

"'Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought;
Do I love the Lord or no,
Am I his or am I not."

"Yet I mourn my stubborn will;
Find my sin a grief and thrall:
Should I grieve for what I feel,
If I did not love at all."

Thus he lived two years longer in a faithful discharge of his Christian duties, before he was fully satisfied of his acceptance through Christ,

and felt it his privilege to unite with the church.

Mrs. Gray's educational advantages had been limited. She being the eldest daughter in her father's family, it had been instilled into her mind from her earliest youth that it was far more profitable for girls to know how to do all kinds of housework, with knitting and darning for accomplishments, than it was for them to have any knowledge of books beyond the Bible, the Hymn book, and Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Under such influences she grew up and developed into a young lady, merely knowing enough of practical arithmetic to calculate closely the value of dollars and cents. When she came West, the secret depths of her heart were dedi-

cated to the god of riches. The love of gain became the all absorbing passion of her life. "Anything to make money that is not dishonorable," was her motto. She hooted the idea of keeping a hired girl when she could do a washing, and cut and make a pair of pants herself, all in one day. The nearest she and her husband had ever come to a downright quarrel, was when he insisted upon employing Betsy Collins to help her do the work.

"No, I wouldn't have the old maid in the house. The gay, dressy, proud thing would only be in my way."

Yet Mrs. Gray, strictly speaking, was not a penurious woman. She gathered herbs enough every year to supply her own family and all

the neighbors. She was ready to go in sickness, and carry them any little delicacy to eat, which her house afforded, or her skilful hands could prepare. If a child was ailing, for miles around, Mrs. Gray was sent for.

"She knew what teas would cure them better than the doctor did," they said. She was thought to be a Christian, though she had never made a public profession of religion. According to her ideas of piety, it was not desirable to tell the children Bible stories on Sunday after coming home from church; and singing when having had a sermon to think about, was to her little less than sacrilege. The time could be better employed teaching them the Catechism. But her husband dif-

fered with her on this point. He had a melodious voice himself, and liked to have the children learn to sing God's praises here on earth, for he hoped they would eventually praise him in a fairer clime.

By the time Minnie had reached her fourteenth year she was a great help to her mother, who was more anxious in regard to her daughter's domestic accomplishments, than concerned about her literary attainments. Yet she manifested a depth of mind and taste for learning quite unusual in one so young. Having free access to her father's small, but well selected stock of books, all the little odds and ends of time were strictly devoted to mental culture. He was not at all satisfied that she should only have the ad-

vantages of a district school, and had often promised himself, that when Minnie was a little older and they could spare her better, he would send her on to his sister, who for many years had been principal of a flourishing boarding school for young ladies in New York. But would that time come when they could let her go? She was the little Martha of their household. When he came in from the field heated and tired, it was the thoughtful Minnie who always had the mug of molasses, ginger and water mixed ready for him; and nobody else could fix it to suit his taste so well as she. If any of the family were sick, it was Minnie who must wait on them. She could move about the room so noiselessly, and handle bottles, spoons,

and glasses without knocking them together, and producing those harsh, discordant, jingling sounds so disagreeable to invalids. She had such a knack, too, of arranging the pillows, to make them feel comfortable. Then the nauseous medicine was easier to take if given by her hand. Even Mrs. Gray admitted that she had no confidence in her own abilities as nurse when Minnie was about.

The little flaxen haired girl, whom they christened Kitty, was a wee toddling thing loving everybody and everybody loving her. She made friends with all the turkeys, ducks, and chickens on the place, about as soon as they were hatched; and would spend hours together in trying to teach her pet Chester pig its a,

b, c's. She looked forward to the time when it would leave off answering her with a grunt, and say the letters for her just as she pronounced them for it. But, alas! for her brilliant hopes, piggie sickened and died. "Killed," her father ventured to suggest, "by an overdose of kindness. But you could not help it, pet. Don't fret about it and I will try to hunt you up another." There was nothing left to be done now, only to give it a respectable burial. A grave must be dug under the old plum tree. After it was finished, the funeral procession formed and marched up in regular order. First came Kitty, as chief mourner, hauling "Chester" on a board with a string tied to it. Then followed, soberly enough, the house

dog Towser, and Tabby the cat. A suitable head-board had to be put up, too, and Kitty prevailed upon her father to print upon it the inscription she dictated—

"*Here lies my white Chester pet pig. I'm so sorry it died. Please don't step on it anybody. I loved it so much.* KITTY GRAY."

But childhood's griefs are transient. She visited the grave only about once a day, after her father brought her a new wax doll from town, that could open and shut its eyes. There wasn't a happier little girl to be found than Kitty was, when she beheld it dressed in the prettiest of pink frocks, and the dearest pair of little shoes, that she could pull off and put on at pleasure. Her delight knew no bounds,

when Minnie, afterwards, added a hat to its wardrobe. In her rambles, somewhere about the barn-yard, she had picked up such a beautiful feather, which she thought might once have belonged to her favorite spotted hen. So it was immediately dignified with the name of "plume," and henceforth was to grace Miss Dolly's hat.

CHAPTER II.

THE THANKSGIVING.

THE morning "chores" were all done up, and Farmer Gray started towards the house, with that quick, energetic step, habitual to him, only when he had something of importance upon his mind.

"What's the matter, Martin," enquired Mrs. Gray, as she glanced up from her work, and noticed a nervous twitching at the corner of her husband's mouth; "anything gone wrong about the barn?"

"No, I guess everything's all right enough out there; but you

remember that chapter I read at prayers this morning, don't you?"

"Yes, it was something about not calling your rich neighbors when you made a dinner, but I thought we had decided yesterday not to invite any company to this one, so I don't see why you should be troubled."

"It is that very decision that's worrying me, Susan. Here you have got the finest turkey on the farm all ready to put into the oven; and there are plenty of mince pies, pumpkin pies, doughnuts, and lots of other fixings to go with them. Now what's the use of cooking all these things, and not have anybody in to help us eat them? It seems to me, wife, that it looks mean and selfish."

"I don't think it's mean or selfish either to eat your own victuals, that you've worked hard for. But if you feel so dreadfully about it, and it's not too late, maybe you had better saddle "Prince," and let Minnie ride over and ask Taylor's folks; nothing would please her better than to do it I suppose; for when the cake came out so beautifully done, she was wishing somebody besides ourselves could be here to share it with us. It's easy to be seen whose disposition that girl inherits most. Can't bear to have anything without giving part of it away. I often tell her she will never be worth a penny. I reckon it would add to her happiness, too, if she could pack a basket with provisions, and leave it at the

Weston's, as she goes along; for she proposed taking them something this morning."

"I have a better plan than either of those to propose," said Mr. Gray. "Suppose we have Mrs. Weston, her crippled husband, and their little blind boy over to spend the day with us? If I remember aright they came from Massachusetts, and it would do them good to have a regular old fashioned Thanksgiving dinner. Then we would literally be following the teachings of the Bible, which says, 'When thou makest a feast call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind," and they would be about as unlikely to make a recompense as any persons I know of. Come, wife, what do you say?"

"Say, yes, of course; for you and Minnie can always find a text of Scripture to suit the case exactly, when your minds are set on anything. But I would like to enquire how your guests are to get here! I'm sure Mr. Weston couldn't walk half way."

"That difficulty is easily enough disposed of. I'll hitch "Prince" to the little wagon and drive over after them."

In a short time Mr. Gray returned, bringing his friends along, and his wife received them cordially. She too had been pondering over a verse during her husband's absence: "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." A little effort on her part to be entertaining, soon made Mrs. Weston feel

comfortable in her rather novel position; for it had been a long time since she had made a visit. Minnie listened with respectful interest to a recital of Mr. Weston's infirmities. But after Mr. Gray came in, and they commenced talking of the "doings down East on Thanksgiving days," a pleasant topic for them both, Mr. Weston forgot all about the pain in his foot, his distressing cough, and the stitch in his side. Kitty took charge of blind Charley, and offered to trade him a little story she knew about "Goody Two Shoes," for a nice fairy tale.

That memorable Thanksgiving night Farmer Gray's family sat up later than usual to talk over the events of the day. A part of the happiness they had been the means

of bestowing upon others, was reflected back upon their own hearts.

"They seemed to enjoy themselves very much," remarked Mrs. Gray. "Mr. Weston said, that the dinner reminded him so much of one they had at their house once, when his brother Ned came all the way from college and they were all at home. If it reminded him of pleasant times I am glad they were here."

I wish it would always stay Thanksgiving," was Kitty's comment as she clambered upon her father's lap and rested her curly head against his broad shoulder.

"And what part did you enjoy most, little 'sunbeam?'" asked Mr. Gray.

"I think I liked the pretty verses best of all."

"What verses? I didn't hear any."

"O, I forgot, Charley didn't say them to you; but he told them over to me ever so many times because I wanted him to. Would you like to hear some, father?"

"Yes, if you can remember them."

"They begin this way,

"'O mother, I've been with an angel to-day.'

"I cant think what comes in next, father; for everytime I would get to wondering why he didn't ask the angel to let him go home with him, and I couldn't mind any more."

"Well, never mind, that will do for this time, and perhaps you can think of the rest to-morrow. It is time you and Minnie were both in bed. Kiss me good-night, darling."

CHAPTER III.

KITTY'S DEATH.

Smooth out the ringlets, close the blue eyes,
No wonder such beauty was claimed in the skies;
Cross the hands gently, o'er the white breast;
Drop a tear tenderly, Kitty's at rest.

FOUR months have gone by, since we last looked in upon the family at the farm-house; and spring has returned again, with all its cheering beauty. Old Towser lies at the kitchen door, waiting for his little mistress to issue forth for their accustomed morning ramble. Whenever the door opens and shuts, he looks up and wags his bushy tail expectantly; but Kitty does not

come. Nothing could induce him to leave his post. They said he had faithfully kept that weary vigil for many, many days. It was fondly hoped, at first, that she had only taken a little cold, and would soon be well again. Mrs. Gray tried all her herb teas; but she grew worse, and the doctor was called in. He, too, exhausted all his skill, but in vain. He could not cure her. Like a beautiful flower, when touched by autumn's chill breath, Kitty drooped and faded.

"I'll do all I can to save her," was the reply to Mr. Gray's oft r peated question, by the kind-heart physician, who knew too well that she could not last much longe and he turned away to hide a tear.

"Minnie!"

"Here I am, darling, right beside you."

"Kiss me good-bye, sister, for I'm going soon. Tell blind Charley for me, that he must love the dear Saviour and meet me in heaven. He can see me there; and you, sweet sister, you will come there too. I'll be waiting for you."

"Mother!" But Mrs. Gray was not there to hear that name for the last time from the lips of her dying child. She had not the Christian's prop to lean upon, in the bitter hour of trial; and when told "Kitty must die," she broke down entirely, and was then in her own room unconscious of her misery.

"Father!" and the little wasted arms were drawn closer around her

father's neck. "I love you, father; and I love Jesus too. Don't grieve for me when I'm gone. I will live with him and the pretty angels till you come."

"I can not give you up, my precious child," and the strong man bowed his head and wept. When he again looked upon her face a happy smile was resting there. She had fallen asleep.

Mrs. Gray came out of one fainting fit, only to fall into another. Minnie had no time to indulge her sorrow for the little sister she had so loved and lost. Her mother claimed all her attention.

It was several days after the funeral, before Mrs. Gray was able to leave her room; and neither sickness nor death had softened her

rebellious heart. It was harder than before. She again arose and went about her household cares, unconvicted and unconverted.

"I don't believe your father cared so much for Kitty after all," she remarked one day to Minnie.

"O, mother, you never could say that if you had witnessed his agony as I did, the day she was taken from us. He went away, after it was all over. I followed him," sobbed Minnie, "and heard that pleading cry, 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.' I knelt beside him; but he placed his hand upon my head and said, 'Leave me, daughter, I would be alone with God.'"

"He does not sympathize with me though," replied Mrs. Gray. "I can never get him to talk about her."

That night at worship, Mr. Gray attempted to read the ninetieth Psalm: "Lord thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations."

He could go no farther. The last time he had read that, Kitty was sitting in her little chair beside him.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER SORROW.

"MINNIE, Minnie."

"Yes, mother, I'm coming," answered a cheerful voice. She had been weeping over a tiny half worn shoe, but she hastily put it away and removed all traces of tears before going down-stairs.

"I do wish you'd learn to take a little interest in things, Minnie," was her mother's querulous salutation, when she came into the room. "You don't care, I suppose, if this is the first day of May, the time to commence spring house-cleaning."

"Really, mother, I did not think about it."

"Think! Well you ought to think, and then perhaps you'd be more concerned about the work that's waiting to be done. Turned your sixteenth year now, I believe. When I was of your age I could spin my dozen a day easily, and go visiting besides." And Mrs. Gray tugged away more industriously than ever at a piece of carpet she was trying to take up from the floor.

"I'll tell you what it is, Minnie, books are going to be the ruination of you. It's well enough to study, when you've nothing else to do, but its all wrong to neglect other things, for the sake of filling your mind with a lot of stuff, that will only

have a tendency to make you feel above your proper business."

"I wonder if mother's increasing ill-temper isn't one of the crosses I'll have to bear," thought Minnie, as she gave an extra polish to the glass in the window she was cleaning. "Mr. R—— spoke so often of the crosses of life, in that beautiful sermon of last Sabbath." But here her reverie was again interrupted.

"Minnie, are you done in there?"

"Not quite, mother, there is one place I cannot reach."

"Some excuse I'll warrant. Here give me the cloth. I do wish that you'd grow taller. See how soon I can finish this up." And suiting the action to her word, she laid hold with an energy that quickly caused every speck of dirt to disappear.

It was very evident that such unceasing toil, day in and day out, as Mrs. Gray chose still to pursue, notwithstanding a warning attack of nervous headache now and then, was making sad inroads upon her health and disposition; and her once musical voice was fast losing its sweetness, by her constant habit of scolding. They had been making preparations to build for a long time. The site chosen was a knoll, not far from their old home, and within view of the only brook the farm could boast of. Mr. Gray exercised his somewhat cultivated taste for landscape gardening, in laying off the grounds and planting trees.

"Let us have it beautiful. We expect to live and die there," he

would say to his wife, when told that there was too much time and labor being spent upon mere useless ornament, that would not bring in a dime.

"Which of these do you like best, Susan?" and Mr. Gray held up for her inspection three architectural designs.

"How can I tell when I haven't examined?" was the curt reply.

"Come, then, let's spread them out here upon the table and you can take your choice."

"Who drew them?"

"I have forgotten the man's name. Some one in New York, I think."

"It's to be hoped, Mr. Gray, that you will some day find better uses for your money than buying sense-

less pictures. I don't want to look at them. So, there's the end of it. Just build the house as you please. I don't care, so there's a good cellar under it to keep things from freezing."

"And which is to be my room, father?" said a more interested listener to the details of his plans.

"If we conclude on this, dear," pointing to a representation of a picturesque two story frame; "I think the room on the south side, with the two large windows, would be the most pleasant for you."

A sweet "thank you, father," accompanied the fond kiss left upon his bronzed cheek.

"If you two are about through your nonsense over there, I'd like to have somebody come and look at

the pies before they are burned." It was Mrs. Gray who spoke, and Minnie skipped away to do her bidding.

Was it Mr. Gray's impressions respecting the brevity of his life that made him anxious to have his wife and daughter comfortably situated in their new home before he left them? Be that as it may, it seemed as if the building could not go up fast enough. He was there himself, early and late, to watch its rapid growth under the workmen's hands, with a restless interest altogether foreign to his usually unexcitable temperament. How glad he was to hear the finishing strokes of the hammer, and see the last nail driven. Then he could not brook the least delay in getting into it.

"Father, I hope you will soon be your own dear self again, now that we have got settled in our new home," Minnie smilingly remarked a few days after the removal. "I'm delighted with my room. How happy we will be here. You must keep Joe to do the heavy work a while longer, father," she rattled on, "for I intend to have you play the lazy gentleman, until you get real strong and well again." But her gay bantering tone soon changed to one of alarm and sorrow, when she saw how haggard and worn that loved face looked. They had been so busily engaged that the quick eye of affection even had not noticed the change, which the bright lamplight now plainly revealed.

"O, father, you have been suffer-

ing and never told us;" and in a moment Minnie was standing by his side, gently smoothing the hair back from his furrowed brow.

"Not much, daughter," he replied. Then as if speaking to himself he murmured,

"Strange that a harp of thousand strings, should keep in tune so long. It is time some of the chords should jar now and then. But, Minnie, if anything should happen," he continued, "I want you to promise me one thing, dear, will you?"

"Yes, father, anything."

"You must always be kind to your mother, and never leave her nor forsake her. I wish you would ask her if she can come in now, and we will have prayer, earlier tonight, for I feel very tired. See if

you can find Joe, too, dear. I think I heard him closing the front gate just now."

"Oh! no, not dead!" moaned Minnie as they came in, in a few minutes after, and found him lying back in his arm chair, so white and still, with his hand resting upon the open page before him, where he had probably been reading, "I am the resurrection and the life." Yes, the soul of Martin Gray had fled to the God who gave it. "Died of heart disease," was the verdict of the family physician, who had been summoned in hot haste.

CHAPTER V.

THE VISITOR.

"MY little man, can you tell me where Mrs. Gray lives?"

"I can that. Do you see that old tumble down looking house off there, at the end of the lane? Well, there's where the widow and her daughter keep themselves now. I reckon you'll find'em at home, mister, for I saw the parson coming out of there a bit ago. Good-day, stranger." And before the well dressed gentleman had made a reply, for he stood looking in the direction pointed out, the urchin had doffed his brimless

hat, turned a summersault in the middle of the dusty road, and was up and off almost out of sight.

"Surely that boy must have been mistaken, or else he fibbed, for the pleasure of prolonging my walk in this unendurable heat. However, there is no other way but to go and see. Perhaps I can get some clue there to my sister's whereabouts. I had the impression that she lived in a large white house." And the weary man started on, pausing not again in that broiling July sun, until he stood on the cool porch of the old farm house.

"It's over six weeks now since I wrote that letter to brother George," Mrs. Gray was saying to Minnie, "but I suppose we'll not hear from him."

"Yes you will, Susan. He is here to answer it in person. That was what you wanted, wasn't it?" The stranger off the roadside, then stepped in at the open door, extending one hand to Mrs. Gray and the other to Minnie, remarking, "There is no need of an introduction. You look just like your father as I remember him eighteen years ago. Haven't you a kiss for your Uncle George, Minnie?"

After greetings had been exchanged, and the two seated, Mr. Herbert addressing his sister, asked,

"How is it that you are living in such an old shell as this? I certainly expected to find you in better quarters."

"You have not heard of our misfortunes, then?"

"Only the intelligence of your husband's sudden death, which you wrote me yourself; but I knew you had built a new house last Spring, and why do you not occupy it?"

"For a very good reason. It was burnt to the ground the very day after Martin was buried."

"You don't tell me so, Susan! How in the world did it happen? Some carelessness no doubt."

"We do not know certainly, but we think it must have caught some way from the kitchen chimney. At any rate, the first we knew of it, the fire was blazing from the roof. There was a brisk wind blowing at the time and it wasn't possible to save it. The neighbors gathered and did all they could. They managed to get most of the furniture out,

but the house went, and the terrible heat blighted the trees near it, so that they have died since. If you would like to see desolation in reality, we will take a walk over there after the sun goes down, and you can behold the ruin wrought.'

"You speak bitterly, Susan."

"I feel bitterly, George."

"You have a considerable sum of money on interest, haven't you? Another dwelling can be erected, and build it of brick this time. Make it fire proof too. If you wish, I can furnish you the lumber myself, and have it shipped here much cheaper than you could buy it for inside work in this country, where seasoned timber is so high. Give me the contract, Susan, and I will take the entire responsibility off

your shoulders free of charge, except for materials used."

"Wait a moment and we will see. It is true, we had money deposited in the bank; but it failed about the time our house was burned, and our nine thousand dollars have gone with the rest."

"Bad, bad, but still it might be worse. This is a splendid piece of land I should judge, and I noticed as I came along that the fences were in first rate trim. You have a fine lot of fruit trees too, and I don't see anything to prevent you from making a good living, if things are managed properly. Let me advise you, Susan. Employ two able bodied men, who know something of farming; then hire a good stout girl to do the kitchen work.

Minnie can assist you in the housekeeping department, and you can carry on farming yourselves, realizing a handsome profit."

"Perhaps it would be well to hear the whole story, George, before making your calculations. There were some trifling debts against the estate, but small as they were, we had not the means to cancel them. After everything was lost, and in order that these debts against the estate might be settled, I found it necessary to have an administrator appointed to adjust such matters for us. After all my late trials and losses, I could not consent to undertake so difficult a task myself; and our neighbor, Mr. H., was selected and duly appointed as the administrator, who has, I think, done the

best he could for Minnie and me, but the heartless creditors, instead of giving us a little time, have become clamorous for immediate payment of their paltry claims, and Mr. H. found it necessary, and in fact has already petitioned the Court for leave to sell the farm. If you had been a poor man, George, I would not have sent for you, but you are rich, and can help me if you will."

"I've lost a good deal lately, Susan, in some unfortunate speculations I went into. I'm willing to do something for you though. What shall it be?"

"Well, George, if I could borrow a few hundred dollars to pay off these debts, our farm and house might yet be saved.

"Don't see how I can let you

have any cash, Susan. Money matters are very close with me just now. I think I'll have to start back to-morrow, sister. My business never goes right when I am absent long."

Nothing could induce her brother to stay over another day.

"You must come and see your cousins sometime, Minnie. Keep up a good heart, Susan, and trust to Providence. Things will brighten up after awhile," were Mr. Herbert's parting words next morning to his niece and sister, as he bade them an affectionate farewell.

CHAPTER VI.

SLANDER.

THE neighborhood where Mrs. Gray lived was thrown into a tumult one day by a "LEGAL NOTICE," which appeared in the weekly county paper, headed "Administrator's sale of real estate," in flaming capitals. Then followed the usual formal description of the property to be sold at public auction, to the highest bidder, for cash in hand, to satisfy debts against the estate of Martin Gray, deceased. Some there were who sympathized with Mrs. Gray. They remembered

with grateful affection her kindness as neighbor and friend in years gone by; while others said, "'twas good for her. No worse than she deserved. She'd always carried a high head, and pride must have a fall." Two busybodies immediately hurried off to pay Mrs. Gray and her daughter a visit, taking a copy of the paper along, that they might observe what effect this fresh calamity would have upon them, if they hadn't seen it yet. Much to their disappointment, however, neither of them were there. "Gone to town," they were told. By the time they had reached home again, another item of news awaited digestion, more wonderful than the first,—for they had expected that all along.

"Would you believe it," asked

their informant, "They are keeping boarders for a living. I saw Minnie, myself, this morning trudging along the street with a great market basket upon her arm; and when I stopped a minute to question her about things, she wouldn't give me much satisfaction."

"But when did they leave the farm? We knew nothing of it."

"O, more than six weeks ago, but I must go," and Mrs. Patten went on her way to spread the intelligence still farther. Meanwhile we will see how the objects of their anxious solicitations were faring.

"Just to think, Minnie, that we must come to this at last; live in a rented house and be waiters for folks," was Mrs. Gray's complaint,

as they were setting things to rights in one of their boarder's rooms.

"Do not be so desponding, mother. I am sure we are getting along very nicely. How much did you say we had over expenses last month?"

"Thirteen dollars and twenty-five cents exactly."

"Well, now, isn't that doing pretty well for beginners? If we can save that much every few weeks, we'll have enough by and by to purchase a little farm; then we will away to the country again, mother, where we can get a breath of pure air without a cloud of dust with it."

"You forget that when cold weather comes on, there will be extra wood and coal to buy; and I guess you'll find before we're through

with it, that winter will eat up all the profits of the summer. There is nothing before us, Minnie, but hard work, and small pay. If George had only acted like a brother, it might have been otherwise. I don't see how he could be so unfeeling. He gives largely to public charities, but couldn't afford to lend his own sister a dollar. I never was given to air-castles though, like some people. It is best to look at the practical part generally. That reminds me, did you pare the potatoes, and set the apples on to stew?"

"Yes, mother, and I have the biscuit all ready to bake when it is time."

"I wish you had not meddled with the biscuit, Minnie. I'd always rather see to them myself. Ten to one they'll not be fit to eat. After

this, now, you do what I tell you, and let other things alone."

Later in the day a woman might have been seen wending her way towards Mrs. Gray's residence.

"Good evening," said Martha Green as she entered the room unannounced, where Mrs. Gray sat busily engaged in hemming towels.

"Good evening, Martha, take a chair."

"Thank you, you seem to be full of work as usual."

"Yes, we have six boarders and keep no help; so there isn't much time for sewing until after supper is over."

"Where is Minnie, Mrs. Gray?"

"She ran over to the parsonage to carry home a receipt book Mrs. R. had lent us."

"Will she be likely to come back soon?"

"I expect her before dark."

"I guess then there will be time enough to have a little talk before she returns. Is there any one about to overhear our conversation, Mrs. Gray?"

"No one but ourselves; you must have something of importance to communicate, Martha; let me know what it is at once."

"I'll not keep you very long in suspense, Mrs. Gray. You are not a member of the church, are you?"

"No."

"But your husband was?"

"Yes."

"Then out of respect to his memory, you ought to be more careful of your reputation."

"Martha Green, what do you mean?"

The voice was as calm as her own. Knowing something of Mrs. Gray's impetuous temper she had been prepared for a storm, but the question was only repeated—

"What do you mean?"

"I called here especially this evening to tell you as a friend, that there is a rumor afloat which will be likely to ruin your character."

"Ruin my character! you talk in riddles. Please explain them."

"I will do so, and believe me, Mrs. Gray, that my motive in coming to you, on this unpleasant errand, was dictated by the purest friendship, and a desire to serve you if I could. For my part if there were stories going about me, I'd thank anybody

who would inform me of them in the right kind of spirit. Circumstantial evidence is against you, I fear. A certain person was going to market very early last Monday morning, and saw you taking tomatoes out of old Mrs. Bender's garden. How do you account for this, Mrs. Gray?"

"Easily enough, Martha Green. Mrs. Bender has more tomatoes than she can use. I have a large family to cook for, and did not get here in time to make garden, and she very kindly offered me as many as I chose to pick. I have gone after them just whenever it suited my convenience to do so, and I question the right of any one to be prying into my domestic affairs."

"Very true, Mrs. Gray, but people

will interfere sometimes in what doesn't concern them. Your statement is very satisfactory to me; but the story is going now that Mrs. Gray stole a basket of tomatoes from the Widow Bender's garden, then there may be something else added to it before this time, and the question is, how is the dreadful gossip to be hushed up? I don't see any better plan than to make a public explanation some way; for it is very hard to stop these tattlers' tongues when they are once started. This thing may keep on increasing, Mrs. Gray, until I wouldn't like to say where it might end. It was only last evening when Mrs. Hinton was speaking to me about it, and I told her I didn't think it was true; but she shook her head and said,

'Well, a body never knows who's who, now-a-day.' But I see Minnie turning the corner, and I must go. If I hear anything more about it, I'll come over and let you know. Good-bye, Mrs. Gray."

"Good-bye."

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. GRAY'S DEATH.

"Thou hast a friend, if friend you ask,
That will not fail when others fly:
Then shed no tear for sorrows past,
Look up and hope for help is nigh.
When Autumn leaves are falling fast,
And Autumn winds are moaning low,
If slanders foul thy soul would blast,
Thou hast a friend to ward the blow."

WHERE am I?"

"Safe in your own bed, mother. Lie still and take another sleep." It was Minnie's face that bent over her, and the familiar voice soothed her to sleep again.

"Everything depends upon your mother being kept perfectly quiet,

Miss Minnie. Her nervous system has undoubtedly received a serious shock. Do you know of anything that could have caused it?"

"No, doctor. She seemed as well as usual when I went out this evening; and when I returned, I found her lying upon the floor, apparently dead. One of the boarders happened to come home, or I don't know what I should have done."

"It is very strange." And the doctor, after giving the most minute directions in regard to his patient's treatment, arose to go, saying: "I will send some one to watch with you, and if there should be any change during the night, let me know immediately."

"I wonder whom I can get," was the physician's soliloquy, as he

walked rapidly down the street. I've already been up two successive nights, but it won't do to leave that child alone, even if I have to stay myself. Happy thought! There's Martha Green, always ready to go. Capital nurse too. Here's her door." Thump, thump, thump. But after waiting and hearing no stir, the ponderous knocker was made to do duty again. This time with a will, that caused a window to be suddenly raised in the second story, from which cautiously issued a head and pair of shoulders, and a familiar voice asked,

"What's wanted?"

"I want to see you. But come down, please, for I've made noise enough here already to arouse the seven sleepers."

"La! Dr. Shelby, is that you? Well, I'll open the door in a trice."

As soon as he had gained admittance, the doctor made known his business.

"Mrs. Gray is very sick, and I called to see if I could get you to go and sit up there to-night, Martha. May I depend upon you?"

"Is she dangerous, doctor?" was asked in a tone of concern.

"I think she is."

"What is the matter?"

"I am not prepared to answer that question. Nothing contagious though. Her nerves have been in an unnatural state of excitement, but can't tell exactly what it will end in, till the effect of the powerful opiate I gave her has worn off. Will you go?"

"Oh! no, doctor, I cannot."

"Why, what's the matter? you tremble like an aspen leaf. Not got the ague, I hope."

Martha Green was conscience-stricken, and with many sobs and tears she hurriedly related to the doctor the story of her visit to Mrs. Gray. When she had finished, he looked very grave.

"Let this be a lesson to you, Martha. That petty scandal may cost Mrs. Gray her life yet. It surprises me, that a woman of your good sense would be guilty of peddling such trash." And without further comment, or paying any attention to the pale face before him, the doctor abruptly left the house, and went back to Mrs. Gray's. When she awoke from her dreamless

slumber, his worst fears were realized. A slow fever had set in, and a complication of diseases followed. Hitherto she had borne the loss of child, husband, and property. But, when this blow came, this blot upon the fair page of her reputation, it was too much, and she bowed under the heavy stroke. It mattered not that her innocence was speedily proved, and the slanderer condemned. Her heart had been pierced by the arrow of defamation, and it never recovered from the cruel blow. And now the realities of the eternal world began to open up before her; and her past life, spent in early pursuits, without any interest in the salvation of her immortal soul, arose in condemnation against her.

"Not lost," replied the faithful minister. p. 69

"Oh! I am lost, eternally lost!" was her exclamation, made in the very bitterness of despair, when they told her that her days on earth were almost numbered.

"Not lost," replied the faithful minister, whom she would hardly suffer now to go out of her sight. "Remember that the dying thief upon the cross received this precious promise, 'To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.' Only believe on Christ, and he will not leave you comfortless."

"But I have sinned away my day of grace. It is too late! too late!" she cried in an agony of terror.

"No, no, my dear friend, you have been mercifully spared to repent and seek forgiveness. Consider how thankful you should be that

your reason is permitted to retain its throne."

"Will God forgive such an one as I am, Mr. R.?" was her eager question.

"Yes, he will, for Christ's sake. Cast the burden of your guilt upon the crucified Redeemer. He is able and willing to save you, though you come to him at the eleventh hour."

Thus days passed, and Mrs. Gray's bodily pains were nothing to what she suffered from the pangs of an accusing conscience. She realized the terrors of the law, without being able to lay hold upon the promises.

"Take warning by me," she would say to those around her. "Be prepared for death before the fiat has gone forth. I have lived the life of the ungodly, but O how hard

it is to die the death of the unrighteous! Pray for me, Mr. R., pray for me."

She prayed earnestly herself too, and her agonizing cry for mercy was at last answered: as far as they were able to judge, her death bed repentance was genuine; and she could repeat hopefully the Saviour's comforting words to his disciples—

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

"In my father's house are many mansions; If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

No murmuring word escaped her

lips now; never one repining thought. She was led through much tribulation, to feel that all God's dealings with her had been in kindness. Her only worldly trouble was for Minnie's welfare.

"What will become of my dear child when I am gone?"

When assured by the minister and his good wife that Minnie should never want a home as long as they had one, "then," she replied "I can die happy." It was at the dawn of a bright Sabbath morning that her spirit took its flight. Her pathway through life had been stormy, but how peaceful was its termination! A few days after the funeral, Mrs. R. and Minnie were alone in the family room at the parsonage. The sorrowful events of the last few

weeks seemed to the orphan like a dream from which she had suddenly awakened. They were speaking of her mother's chequered life and triumphant death, when a servant entered, saying, "a letter for Miss Minnie." She instantly recognized the peculiar hand writing of her Uncle George, and hastily breaking the seal, read—

"My Dear Niece: I sincerely sympathize with you in your heavy affliction; but time and religion can alone soften such calamities to us. I truly loved my sister, and the knowledge that she has gone to that bourne from whence no traveler returns, fills my heart with sorrow. Yet we ought to rejoice, that her weary pilgrimage on earth is ended.

They wrote me that she had a long and painful illness; but I trust she has gone to receive the reward of her patient sufferings. How rich you are, my child. Sister, father, mother, all in heaven. May we too be prepared for that great change, which sooner or later must come to each of us, is the prayer of

"Your affectionate uncle,

"GEORGE HERBERT."

CHAPTER VIII.

TEACHING SCHOOL.

"MY dear, I have succeeded in procuring a seat for you in the coach," said Mr. R., upon his return from a walk to the stage office about three months after Mrs. Gray's decease. I wish you had been content to stay with us, Minnie. We shall miss you sadly when you are gone."

"It is very kind in you to speak thus, my dear friend," she replied, "but I believe I will be happier if I have some employment. Now, whenever I am alone, I think of the listless, aimless life I am living here, and you don't know how much it

troubles me. My health is sufficiently restored; and I feel that I ought to be at work."

"If you really feel so, my child, we would not urge you to remain against your wishes, but bear in mind, there will always be a place for you in the parsonage, and warm hearts ready to welcome you back, at any time you may choose to come. And with many promises to write often and freely, the minister and his wife bade their young friend good-bye.

Minnie hardly realized that she was facing the stern realities of life, until she stood face to face with a lot of rude boys, who had congregated in the passage way leading into the school-house, for the purpose of getting a good view of the

new teacher, as she approached the door. Her pleasant "good morning, boys," met with a response from some of the most refined; others tittered; while the ringleader of the crowd stepped gallantly forward, and wanted to know if they hadn't manners enough to let the "school ma'am pass." His timely speech produced the desired effect. Space was immediately cleared; and Minnie walked bravely through, on up to where the girls were standing, many of whom were taller than herself. She paused to exchange a few words with them, before ascending the form to call the school to order. Minnie felt that her courage was fast giving way, when she finally took the teacher's seat, under the fire of the forty pairs of eyes levelled at her.

For a moment she hesitated. A great struggle was going on in her heart, when a suppressed whisper reached her ear.

"I guess teacher don't know how to begin, boys."

It was then she arose with quiet dignity, saying, "We will open school with prayer."

Murmurs of surprise greeted this announcement. They had not been accustomed to enter upon their school duties with prayer, but they quickly died away, as they heard her simple words of faith and trust; and listened to the earnest petition which followed, that the Father's blessing would rest upon teacher and pupils, and that they might one and all be led in the path of righteousness for His name's sake." Ere many days

had passed, they had learned to love the morning's devotional exercise, and the evening's hymn of praise, when the labors of the day were over. The over-grown boys who had so positively declared, that they wouldn't be ruled by that little thing; when they looked upon her youthful face and figure, for the first time, forgot to carry their promised threats of mutiny into execution. Big boys have big hearts; and there was power enough in the moral lever she applied, to lift their minds above all thoughts of disobedience. They became her most faithful champions in the cause of right. The committee paid visits of inspection, and expressed themselves well pleased with the aspect of affairs. They had never seen better order. And

as they afterwards congratulated themselves, when in solemn conclave over some improvements that were to be made in the building, "Haven't we secured a treasure in Miss Gray?" The promised happiness in the unbounded success of this her first great undertaking was destined however to soon come to an end.

"Please show me how to do this sum, Miss Gray."

"I'll attend to you in a moment, dear," and she presently leaned over the desk, to see what it was, that could so perplex one of her brightest pupils.

"Have you learned the rule?" was the first question.

"Yes, Miss Gray, I know it all by heart. But I don't believe this

comes under the rule; for I've tried and tried ever so many times, but I cannot get it."

Minnie soon saw there was something about the question she did not understand either. So she urged the ambitious student to make another effort before giving it up, and turned away. But now another hand was raised.

"We have come to Equation of Payments, Miss Gray; I do not know how to compute the days in this. Please explain it to me."

"Did you carefully study the example that is worked out, John?"

"Yes, indeed; and did it on my slate three times over without looking on my book. I think it was all from memory though. It's the principle I don't understand, Miss Gray.

It must be the easy examples they write out, for I counted the same way in this one, and had ten years too much, nearly every time."

"Try once more, John. It will be worth a great deal to you if you get it yourself," and Minnie called the first class in spelling.

She did not leave the school-house that evening until she had secured exact copies of the two problems that had been the cause of so much trouble, and carried them home with her. After tea was over, she excused herself from the family, and retired to her room, and worked until the characters upon the paper before her became blended into one confused mass. But the answers would not come. Her head ached violently, and she was at last

obliged, from sheer exhaustion, to give it up, and seek her couch, where she tossed restlessly from side to side; but finally dropped into a troubled sleep, only to dream of arithmetic, and see visions of mathematical figures dancing a jig.

The next day John met her with a beaming smile upon his plain honest face.

"I've solved the problem, Miss Gray. I'm so glad now that you did not show me yesterday. Mother said if I'd always had somebody to teach me how to help myself, I would know more than I do now. I'll always think of your words, 'Try once more, John,' when I get into a tight place."

Freddy looked a little embarrassed. He said, "After I had

worked at mine ever so long, father helped me, then laughed at me for being such a 'dummy.' It was easy enough done, Miss Gray, after I knew how."

Then, and there, Minnie's resolve was taken. It was useless to try to teach others what she could not comprehend herself. The committee were nonplussed when, on the following Saturday, she handed in her resignation as teacher of the district school. The chairman asked,

"What are your reasons, Miss Gray, for such a strange proceeding? We are so well satisfied with you, that it will be hard to find another to fill your place."

"I am very sorry, sir," was the reply, "but I cannot stay the term out."

"If your engagement is broken, your salary must be forfeited for the time you have already taught. That's the law, I believe,"

"I have already taken that into consideration."

"And yet you wish to be released?"

"I do."

"Very well, Miss Gray. We have nothing more to say, only that we are very sorry to part with you."

As Minnie had assigned no particular reason for leaving them, various were the conjectures made on her hasty decision. The most probable of which was, that she had given it up on account of her health.

"Poor thing; she looked so delicate."

Once more the lumbering stage coach drew up before the front-door of the parsonage.

"Let me know when you want to go back, Miss, so I can keep a seat for you," said the burly driver as he deposited her trunk in the hall.

"Really this is a pleasant surprise," and Minnie was clasped in Mrs. R.'s arms, while her husband came forward, saying, "You are just in time to save me writing a letter, when I have a sermon on hand. We are glad to see you. Vacation is it, Miss Gray?" and there was a quiet smile lurking around the minister's mouth, as he pointed towards her baggage. This was too much for Minnie, and she burst into a flood of tears, and could hardly compose herself enough to reply.

"I have made an inglorious retreat, Mr. R."

"Why how is this, my child? Come sit down and tell us all about it. We supposed from your letters that you were getting along nicely."

"So I was, until I discovered that I had scholars who knew a great deal more about arithmetic than their teacher did."

"Then you gave up your situation, did you?"

"Yes, sir, I thought I had better do it in time to save my credit. I was thinking if you approved of it, Mr. R., that I would write to Aunt Caroline, and see if she will let me have a place in her seminary, where I can go through a regular course of study."

"It is about the wisest proposi-

tion I ever heard you make, Minnie. Pity you hadn't thought of it a little sooner. Perhaps you needed this little experience though, to show you how unfitted you were to assume the responsibility of a teacher. Prepare yourself first for such an important position; then I have no doubt but you will be able to reflect credit upon the profession."

Minnie was determined to be educated. There was energy and perseverance in that little slender frame of hers. If one scheme or plan failed, she was ready to seize upon another. Accordingly a letter was dispatched to her aunt, and in four weeks the following answer was returned:—

"Yes, Minnie, for your father's

sake alone, I have consented to receive you as a pupil, in my establishment on certain conditions. The first is, you are not to claim relationship, but address me as the others do, simply as Mrs. Howard. The reason is obvious. I wish you to rely upon your own merit entirely to make your character in school. Secondly, I shall expect you to assist in some light household duties, as a remuneration for your board and tuition. Your coming will be sufficient acknowledgment that the above terms are accepted. But if you decide otherwise no further correspondence is necessary.

"Yours truly,

"CAROLINE HOWARD."

CHAPTER IX.

MINNIE GOES TO THE SEMINARY.

THERE were signs of packing up again, going on in a neat little bedroom, at the parsonage, soon after the reception of Mrs. Howard's letter. Minnie had decided to go to the seminary. Mrs. R. kindly sent her tea up, and she waited to finish all her preparations for the morrow's journey before going down stairs.

"I hope we shall hear good accounts of you from the seminary, Minnie," said Mr. R., as she came into the room, and he closed an interesting book, from which he had been reading aloud to his wife. "Let

me urge upon you first of all, though, to be diligent in the cultivation of all Christian graces. Religion and intellectual culture should always go hand-in-hand. Each helps to render the other more beautiful and attractive. Suppose we sing that beautiful hymn, commencing,

'Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love.'

It is particularly applicable to our worship this evening."

After they had sung the hymn, and an appropriate passage of scripture had been read, a most touching prayer followed in behalf of the loved one who was so soon to leave them. When they arose from their knees and bid each other good-night, their eyes were filled with tears.

In the morning the family were assembled at an early breakfast. Immediately after it was over, a carriage came to convey the traveller to the nearest railway station. The moment of parting had arrived, and with a sad heart Minnie took leave of her kind friends; for they knew not when they would meet again. Nothing of note occurred during her journey; and in due time she arrived at her place of destination.

"What a lovely place! I cannot but be happy here," thought Minnie, as she rode through the long avenue, leading up to the main entrance into the seminary building.

"There's a young lady wishes to see you, ma'am."

"Very well, Tim, I will be down soon." And in a few minutes the

stately Mrs. Howard was moving majestically along towards the reception room; when her ever vigilant eye espied something, she could not well make out what it was in the distance, standing right in the front hall.

"This is some more of that porter's carlessness. How often must I direct him to leave the baggage in the gallery? If this offence is repeated, I'll discharge him at once," threatened the irate lady as she approached the black mass. She stopped to examine it more closely, and an exclamation of surprise escaped her lips. "Can it be possible!"

That small hair trunk, with the initials M. G., in brass nails on the top, awakened unpleasant memories, which had long been slumbering.

It reminded her of the time when she had gone to hire out for six dollars a month, as half nurse, half governess, with an outfit of two calico dresses, and a scanty supply of underclothes, packed in a fac-simile of the trunk before her, only it had C. G. marked on the lid. She recognized this as having once been the property of her brother, Martin Gray. Then other paragraphs in the chapter of her past life were recalled. Her employer's eldest son, the gifted Ralph Howard, much to the disappointment of his proud family, wooed and won his mother's beautiful nurse-maid for his wife. But he only lived a short time after their marriage. Before his death, he had taken care to have a moderate fortune in ready money, which had

been left him by his uncle, secured in such a way that his wife could get it after he was no more. With these available means to start with, Mrs. Howard had gone up step by step, until she at last stood at the head of a noble institution of learning. It was not strange then, that she should pause a moment to recover the composure, which that odious hair trunk had ruffled, before entering the room to greet its innocent owner.

"I was hardly expecting you yet, Minnie," said Mrs. Howard, assuming a pleasant tone, which was scarcely in keeping with the state of her mind, as she advanced towards a little figure dressed in deep mourning, and held out her faultless hand to bid her welcome.

"I should not have been here so soon, only I could have company part of the way, and I did not like to miss it.

"You received my letter, of course?"

"Yes, ma'am; just three days before I started."

"And you remember the conditions?"

"I shall not forget them."

"I wish you to understand me, Minnie, I have no objections to your calling me aunt, when we are alone together. Not the slightest. It is only in public that I make this requirement, and then, as I stated in my letter, it is for your own good. You can hardly imagine what a breeze it would create among the girls, if it was once noised through the house, "that Mrs. Howard's

niece had come. As none of my relations have ever visited me, it is generally believed I have no near kin; and for many reasons I would rather have that impression remain. By complying with my desire in this respect, you will reap all the advantages, and be spared the criticisms which otherwise would be showered upon you. In regard to domestic work, I have your real interest at heart there too. You have been trained up to it, and you can study to better advantage if you have plenty of exercise. There is one difficulty, however, in the way, that I hardly know how to dispose of. If you take charge of household cares, it will prevent your eating at the first table with the young ladies. How would you like to take your meals with the

matron and housekeeper, after we are through? They are both refined, and ladylike."

"I think I might like that arrangement," Minnie quietly replied.

"Then, I believe everything is satisfactorily arranged. There is a little room between the nursery and store room, which you may have for your own use. Now a word of caution. If any of the young ladies make overtures of friendship, as it is very reasonable to suppose they will, after you have been here awhile, treat them politely but discourage all attempts at intimacy. It will only lead to an impertinent curiosity on their part, and an awkward embarrassment on yours. You will excuse me now, Minnie, as I have business letters to write.

Amuse yourself with this book of engravings, until they come for you to go to tea, after which Jane will show you to your room."

"You will be very apt to have a room-mate to night, Miss Gray," said the attendant, as she set the light down upon the stand, and was about to leave Minnie to herself.

"I think you must be mistaken, Jane; Mrs. Howard said I was to room alone."

"She may have thought so, but that doesn't prevent Mr. Rat from lodging in this apartment."

"You don't mean to say the room is infested with rats, do you?" asked Minnie in alarm.

"I don't know certain, but there was an awful big one scampered across the floor, when I came in

with the water. There's my bell again. Good-night, Miss Gray. Pleasant dreams," and Jane vanished.

Minnie looked in the direction of her retreating figure with eyes wide open with terror. If there was anything in the world she had a moral dread of, it was rats. The bare idea of being shut up with one made her shudder. All the dreadful stories she had read or heard about them, rushed into her mind. The room had at first struck her as being inferior in its appointments to the one occupied by the servants at the parsonage; but that was forgotten: now, she could only think of rats. She heard some one passing along the hall, and opened the door. It happened to be the housekeeper, with whom she had taken supper.

"Do please come in here a moment, Mrs Grimes."

"Why, what's the matter child? you look as if you were most scared to death."

"Aren't there rats in this room, Mrs. Grimes?"

"Why no, I guess not; but we can soon see." And every nook and corner was speedily searched; but no traces of them were found until they moved the old rickety wardrobe and there, sure enough, was a hole gnawed through the board.

"If you are afraid to stay here, Miss Gray, there is a lounge in my room, you can sleep on to-night, and I will have this place fixed to-morrow." Minnie gladly accepted the kind offer, and was soon sound asleep in the housekeeper's room.

CHAPTER X.

MINNIE'S POSITION IN SCHOOL SETTLED.

"YOU did not understand my question, perhaps," said Mrs. Howard to her head teacher, Miss Tindle. "I asked you what class Miss Gray could enter."

"I believe I answered your question, Mrs. Howard. She can go into the first junior."

"Are you certainly not mistaken, Miss Tindle?"

"I think not."

"Who examined Miss Gray?"

"I did."

"And you think she is prepared for the junior class?"

"That is my opinion, Mrs. Howard."

"But did you know, Miss Tindle, that Miss Gray has lived all her life in the country, until within the last eighteen months; and has only attended school, perhaps twelve weeks in the winter, and staid at home summers?"

"Your conjecture in regard to the amount of time Miss Gray has spent in school may be very correct; or you might argue that she had never seen the inside of a school-house, and it would not change my opinion one iota, in regard to her attainments. She certainly has the knowledge, but where, or how she got it, I am not prepared to say."

"You speak confidently, in this, Miss Tindle."

"Yes, and if I am wrong, I err in judgment."

"Something I have never known you to do yet."

"I have made a memorandum in my note book: shall I read it to you, Mrs. Howard."

"If you please, Miss Tindle."

"To begin with, then, 'Miss Gray is very backward in her mathematics but that is all. Tried her first in spelling, and could find no fault with that. She is a beautiful reader, and has an admirable voice. Gave her a thorough examination in modern geography. She readily analyzed and parsed difficult sentences in grammar. Is more than ordinary in history. She seems

to be well acquainted with the theoretical part of philosophy and chemistry.' And to sum it all up, Mrs. Howard, I do not not think you have another such a botanist in school—I mean among the young ladies of course. But as I stated at first, her knowledge of mathematics is extremely limited. I believe she has never gone through the common school arithmetic, yet."

"It will devolve upon you, Miss Tindle, to suggest how to class this young lady."

"I shall give her arithmetic: let her commence algebra, and insist upon her attending the lectures and experiments in chemistry and natural philosophy. Then another session she could take up astronomy, and if she stays to graduate, she would be

obliged to finish geometry in her senior year."

Before Mrs. Howard retired that night, she sat down and made the following record in her private diary:

"10 o'clock, P. M.

"If I was quite certain Minnie was talented, it would be to my interest to make more of her. But there are many book worms in the world, who do not amount to much, for they never have an idea of their own in their heads. Minnie may belong to this class. Most likely she does; for she could not deceive Miss Tindle, I am sure. To my certain knowledge, there is not a genius in our whole connection on either side of the house. Good, plain, honest people, but nothing

more. Her father might have taught her himself. I recollect now, he used to be very fond of books when we were at home together; and he had quite a little library collected before he was married. Let me see, he wrote to me years ago, about sending his little daughter to me. Said she was pretty well advanced then. That might have been only a father's partiality, though. So there is too much risk to run in Minnie, yet. If I should recognize her as my niece, and she should not turn out brilliantly, how dreadfully mortifying it would be to me. If she was only wealthy, then it would not matter so much. The 'rich heiress' could cover up a multitude of deficiencies. She is a sweet child, and I cannot help liking her, though

I have almost given her a servant's place. She must want an education, or she never would submit so gracefully to my requirements. Her being a Christian has something to do with it perhaps. The housekeeper told me she would not retire last night, until she had read a chapter in the Bible, and said her prayers. That is a very unpleasant room I assigned her, but I think it is the best suited to her circumstances. What work shall I give her to do? Sweep and dust the study hall and class-rooms, after school closes. Wash the tumblers after dinner for she will not need to study history, Miss Tindle said. Then she can help tend the door, when she is not engaged. I did think that I would have her come

to my room to see me occasionally, but I had better not venture it. The girls would think strange of it perhaps. The secret of our connection can be kept and I can perform my duty to my brother's child all the same. I must arrange it, so she will be busy during visiting hours. There will be but few opportunities then, for Minnie to cultivate the young ladies' acquaintance. They will not wish to be familiar with her, however, when they see she is merely an under pupil."

CHAPTER XI.

INCIDENTS OF SCHOOL LIFE.

SCHOOL had already been in session three weeks, when Minnie arrived at the seminary. The girls had divided off into their particular sets, and had chosen their most intimate friends. They were at leisure to be on the watch for any new comer; to take notes on how she looked, dressed and walked, and whether she ate with her fork or not, and see if she poured her coffee into the saucer at table. Nobody could be smuggled into the house, and they not know it. If there was a mystery surrounding any

young lady who had taken up her abode there, they immediately set to work to ferret it out. Curiosity was on tiptoe now concerning Miss Gray. She had been with them five whole days, and nobody had found out yet where she took her meals, or where she roomed. They knew thus much, and no more: Miss Gray answered to her name at roll call, studied in the reception room, and made her appearance in class the moment the bell rung, and recited splendid lessons. But when school was out she disappeared, and they saw nothing more of her till next morning. But it all came out at last. Aggie Donald, in hunting the housekeeper, to buy a little starch for some laces she was doing up, blundered into Minnie's room.

Then that very day, Miss Ballard, though aware that it was against the rules to enter the dining-room, except at meal time, went there to look for a note she had dropped, which had something in it she wouldn't have Mrs. Howard see for the world, and "there was Miss Gray, with a big apron on, and her sleeves rolled up, standing at the sink washing dishes." Some one had seen her, too, coming up the back stairs, with a broom and dust-pan in her hand. So putting all these things together, the unanimous conclusion was, that "Miss Gray was working for her board." Some of the girls who had made advances towards forming her acquaintance withdrew them, and passed her by with a distant bow. Miss Ely, the

rich tallow chandler's daughter, even went so far one day as to say in Minnie's hearing,

"I'm going to ask Miss Tindle to change my seat in the school hall; there is such an offensive odour of dish-water next to me I cannot endure it."

"I guess it's about as agreeable as some of the odours you have at home, Miss Ely. Remember I don't live a hundred miles from your place."

"You here, Kate Bowers!"

"Yes, I am here, and overheard your insulting remark about Miss Gray. She's gone off crying too, and as sure as my name's Kate Bowers, if you don't go right straight and make an apology to her, I'll report you to Miss Tindle. Then see how you'll feel."

Miss Ely looked perplexed. She knew with whom she had to deal. Kate Bowers was the most influential girl in school. She knew too that if Kate took up Miss Gray's cause, she would do exactly as she had promised, report the matter to Miss Tindle. Then it would go into teachers' meeting, and the seventh school rule would be immediately enforced, which read, "If any young lady be guilty of making unkind remarks, so as to injure, or hurt the feelings of another, she shall be suspended for three days or more, as the nature of the offence may require."

"I'll give you five minutes yet by my watch, Miss Ely, to decide what you will do."

"I'm willing to write Miss Gray a note, Kate."

"That will not do. You insulted her publicly, and you owe her a public apology."

There were tears in Miss Ely's eyes, as she asked,

"Do you want me to beg her pardon in presence of the teachers and all the girls?"

"No; I only insist upon your doing so in the presence of those to whom you made the speech. The time is up now; what do you say?"

"I will do as you wish, Kate."

"Stay here then, girls, and I'll bring Miss Gray over. O, there she goes. Miss Gray! Miss Gray!" and, before Minnie knew what she was about, Kate had her arm around her waist, and was half dragging her along to where the girls stood. Minnie was inclined to fall back.

"Now, come, that's a darling. We want you over there; come along." Kate persevered; alternately pulling and coaxing, until she got Minnie where she wanted to have her.

"Now, Miss Ely."

"I'm—I'm sorry."

She then commenced to cry, and hid her face in her handkerchief.

"Now, see here. That won't do. Say more than that," persisted Kate.

"Well, then, forgive me, for being so rude to you, awhile ago, Miss Gray."

Minnie advanced, and frankly took Miss Ely's hand, saying, "Most freely do I forgive you. We will think no more about it."

This little episode was enough of itself to have made a heroine of

Minnie. Then the girls soon learned, that if they would keep in favor with Kate Bowers, they must treat her chosen friend, Miss Gray, kindly.

Unconsciously to herself, Minnie went on the even way, gaining popularity; while Kate looked on exultingly, and thought, "Ere long they will learn to love her for her own sweet self, even as I have done."

Miss Ely's importance declined for a time, and she came near losing what she so much prized, the good opinion of Kate Bowers. But the lesson she received, had a most salutary effect upon her future bearing towards those whom she regarded beneath her in the social scale; and by a course of prudent conduct, she retained the affections of her school-mates.

"I am afraid you are inclined to be partial to Miss Gray," said Mrs. Howard that evening in teachers' meeting, when the monthly reports were being read out. "It is very rare for a young lady to get ten in every study."

"I do like a bright scholar," replied Miss Tindle, "and I would have given Minnie Gray eleven in my classes if I could. It is a marvel to me, how she manages to do her work, and bring such perfect lessons."

"She is always in her place too, and attends to her proper duties at the proper time," chimed in Miss Sheppard.

"I would like to say a word in regard to Miss Gray's compositions."

"Are you sure they are original,

Miss Warren?" interrupted Mrs. Howard; for she was beginning to feel a little nervous.

"Yes, I was just about to remark that their originality was perfectly refreshing; so different from the usual hum-drum school-girl style."

"If there is no particular business to be brought up before the faculty this evening," said the principal, "teachers' meeting can be adjourned."

And they wondered why Mrs. Howard manifested such marked indifference to anything concerning Minnie Gray, when they were all so much interested in her.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PRAYER-MEETING.

IF I could only be instrumental in winning one soul for Christ, it would be worth more than all this," mused Minnie, as she finished looking over a card that had been handed to her, on which was written her list of studies and grade in each, showing that she stood the highest in all her classes.

And while she sat there thinking that in her eager pursuit after knowledge, she had been negligent in speaking to those around her of "the wisdom that is from above," a conversation, in which her name

was often blended, was going on in a room overhead.

"What a lovely type of a beautiful Christian character, dear Minnie Gray is," Lucy Hargraves was saying to her friend Ella.

"Yes, I fully agree with you in that, Lucy. She is an ornament to the holy religion she professes; and this peaceful twilight hour is just the time to talk of heaven and heavenly things. I wish you would tell me, dear, what it was that first directed your thoughts towards the better land. You used to wish that this could always be your abiding place."

"So I did, Ella, but I think differently now. Much as I love my earthly friends, and earthly home, I think I should be 'willing to de-

part and be with Christ.' I never allowed myself to think much about these things though, until one evening there were three other girls besides Minnie and myself sitting out in the grove. We were discussing,—as school girls generally do when they are together,—the merits of the teachers. Then the subject of dress was brought up, but Minnie never opened her mouth except in defense of the "faculty," about whom the rest of us had expressed our opinions rather freely, as much for amusement, as anything else. The girls finally strolled off, and Minnie and I were left alone. My little, quiet, unassuming friend, then kindly told me how wrong it was to make such depreciating remarks about those under whose charge we

were placed, even when we did not mean any harm by it. Before she got through, I was heartily ashamed of the part I had taken in them. We lingered there until the bell rung for study. Then when we arose to go, she put her arm around me in that loving, winning way of hers, and whispered in my ear. 'Lucy, dear, give your fresh, young heart to the Saviour. You will never regret it.' Was it strange then that when we parted at the hall door, I had mentally resolved to give my attention to these things? You have seen the result of that interview, Ella; and I can truly say now, that I wouldn't exchange my hope of heaven 'for all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them.' But do you know, darling,

that I have often wanted to ask you how you became interested in the subject of religion?"

"It was through Minnie, Lucy."

"You suprise me, Ella. Did she speak with you also?"

"No, she never mentioned it to me."

"Then how did it come about; I am anxious to know."

"It was by closely observing Minnie Gray's cheerful walk in the narrow way. I noticed that school rules, and school duties, were as rigidly kept, and as faithfully performed by her, if a teacher happened to be absent, as when she was present. Then her position here in one respect, is a very unpleasant one. Yet she is as devoted to Mrs. Howard's interests, as if she was the

kindest and best friend in the world; and I get to thinking if it was the Saviour's love that shed such a bright lustre over her character, and always helped her to do right, I would like to possess an interest in it also."

"Then what we are, and what we both hope to be, is all owing to sweet Minnie Gray's influence?"

"Yes, Lucy, and more than that; Effie Wilson has become a Christian, too."

"Effie Wilson! Why, Ella, such news seems too good to be true."

"But haven't you noticed how quiet and subdued she has been lately? To me she is not like the same girl. Her rough rowdy ways are all gone. She is as gentle as a lamb, and is constantly in her room

attending to her studies and pet birds."

"Yes, I saw there was a great change in her, Ella; but I had attributed it to the letter she received from home. The girls said she was crying over it, and they supposed there was some sad communication in it."

"There was nothing in that letter to trouble her, Lucy. Effie Wilson, the leader in all sorts of mischief, and the scoffer at everything sacred, was at that very time in the deepest distress concerning the salvation of her soul, and anxiously inquiring what she must do to be saved."

"But, Ellen, how was she awakened? Your statement seems almost incredible!"

"She has been in the habit of

"She is constantly in her room attending to her studies and pet birds." p. 126

going down and sitting on the lecture-room step to look through the key hole, and see and hear what the girls did, and said in their little prayer-meeting, then going away and making sport of it. Well, last Tuesday evening she was there as usual, and Minnie Gray happened to be seated near the door. They called on her to lead in prayer; and Effie's practised ear caught every word she said. No name was mentioned, yet she got the idea into her head that the earnest appeal in behalf of a school-mate, was all meant for her. The arrow of conviction pierced her soul; and there on that step where she had so often made a jest of religion, she knelt for the first time in all her life, to plead for mercy and forgiveness."

"And now she is hopefully converted, Ella?"

"Yes, Lucy."

"How rejoiced I am to hear it; I believe she will make a noble Christian. Three stars, Ella, for Minnie Gray's crown of rejoicing I hope."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHRISTMAS-TREE.

"KATE BOWERS, what are you doing?"

"I am making a carpet. There, I've pricked my finger again. My, but it hurts! Don't look so astonished, Stella. You always frighten me when you roll your eyes up in that fashion. Lock the door, please, and I'll tell you a little secret. I made up my mind that Minnie Gray shouldn't stay in that place any longer without a carpet on the floor; so I got Mrs. Grimes to measure the room for me one day,

and Mrs. Howard selected this herself."

"Did you tell her what you wanted it for?"

"No, she didn't ask me. I want to hurry and finish it. Some of the girls said they would help me put it down to-morrow, if we can manage some way to get Minnie out long enough."

"Then you intend it for a Christmas gift?"

"Yes."

"What do you suppose Mrs. Howard will say when she sees it?"

"I don't know, I am sure; but she ought to say, 'I am very much obliged to whoever made Miss Gray so comfortable.'"

"I wonder if Minnie will come to the parlor to-morrow evening?"

"Yes, I'll make her come."

"But she never has. You know she has always excused herself on account of being in mourning: and by the way, Kate, her best black dress begins to look pretty rusty, and she will not feel like coming to the party in it."

"I noticed that too. I was just thinking when you came in, Stella, if Minnie had some of the money I hardly know how to spend fast enough, and I could take what intellect she could spare in its place, it would be a happy exchange for me."

"We should lose in the intellectual young lady then, the dearest and best little girl in the world, sweet Kate Bowers."

"Bosh! don't repeat such stuff to

my face, Stella. It savors too much of downright flattery coming from you. Have you heard anything more about the Christmas-tree?"

"O, yes, and I forgot to tell you. You and I are both put on the committee of arrangements, which is to meet this evening in the young ladies' parlor, to decide all about it. Mrs. Howard has requested, too, that the girls should not make expensive presents."

"I think, as a general thing, Stella, it ought to be complied with; for there are girls in the seminary who will be induced to make handsome presents, when they really cannot afford it."

"Are you and Minnie Gray the same size, Kate?"

"Yes; but why do you ask that

question?" was retorted, rather shortly by Miss Kate.

"O, I beg your pardon, but I was just thinking you might lend her your black alpaca and no one would be the wiser."

"Nonsense, she needn't wear it."

"It was time now to hie away to the parlor; and while the committee were there busily discussing the matter uppermost in everyone's mind, Minnie Gray sat alone in her cheerless room. She had wrapped an old shawl around her, and was trying to prepare a lesson; but her thoughts would wander away, now and then, from the page before her. She thought of her sister, father, mother, all happy in heaven, this Christmas eve. The dear old farmhouse! How vividly it came up

before her mind now. Then her friends at the parsonage—would they think of her to-night?

"I would like very much to see the Christmas-tree. I know it will be beautiful. The girls are very kind, and want me to come. Kate says she won't take no for an answer this time. How I love that noble, beautiful girl. Aunt Caroline never wants to see me in the parlor though. If she only knew how much I pined for her affection sometimes: but she knows I have no dress fit to wear to-morrow evening, and does not care. But it is not right for me to indulge in such thoughts. She is giving me all she promised—and all I ought to ask—the means of obtaining an education; and I bless her for it. I am

so cold," and Minnie disrobed and crept into her humble bed.

"A merry Christmas to you, Mignonette," and Kate Bower's warm kiss was left on Minnie's lips. "The girls say they are bound to have you down there to help make wreaths this morning. Can you go?"

"Yes, I can be there in half an hour; if that will do.

"All right; they'll expect you, darling. I've lots to do and must be off."

At the appointed time, Minnie went down to where the girls were working.

"You're the very one we wanted to see," exclaimed two or three in a breath. Then one went on to explain—

"Mary Burton insists that little

flags stuck here and there in the festooning will make it look pretty. But we were sure you would not advocate such horrid taste. You must join with us in saying stars and stripes for Fourth of July, but only green and pure white for Christmas."

They were so pleasantly engaged, that they heeded not the flight of time, till the bell summoned them to dinner.

"This certainly cannot be my room," thought the amazed Minnie, for a moment, when she opened her door, and saw a bright new carpet on the floor. Next her eye fell upon the little stand, and on it lay a parcel directed to herself. On opening it, there was a new dress ready made, a pair of kid gloves

just her number, a collar and handkerchief, with a delicate tracery of vine leaves in black around their borders, and a little note, accompanying the gifts, asked, "Will you not wear these to-night for my sake, Mignonette?"

The important moment for opening the parlor door had arrived, and various were the exclamations of delight, when the huge Christmas-tree, extending from floor to ceiling, was exposed to view, brilliantly lighted up with tiny wax candles. There was something on it for everybody, from the principal, who received an elegantly bound Bible, down to the poorest washer-woman in the house, who courtesied low, as she tried on her nice new cap. The committee with sparkling eyes, and

bright scissors, had clipped off and distributed every present to the one to whom it was directed, yet there was still a little package remaining with no name on it. "Open it, open it, and see what it is," were the orders given. The paper was removed, and a morocco case appeared. The lid was sprung, and there lay a gold watch and chain labelled,

"For the young lady who has been the most persevering in the face of the greatest difficulties; recited the greatest number of perfect lessons; and been the most exemplary in her conduct, since she has been a member of this school."

"Who is to have this?"

There was a moment's pause, then a chorus of voices answered,

"Minnie Gray."

"The signs are ominous," mused Mrs. Howard, as she sat in her richly furnished apartment, after the festivities which closed that joyous Christmas at the seminary were all over. "I would give almost anything to know who the purchaser of that piece of extravagance was, and the author of the label. I had no idea Minnie was such a favorite. I wonder if Jane has been unfaithful to her trust. I told her to be on the look out, and report to me what visitors Miss Gray received in her room. The minx said there was only one went there, and she didn't know her name. If this thing goes on, there is no telling in what it may terminate. I would send Minnie back to where she came from, if I could find any reasonable excuse

for doing so. I must see after this night's proceedings. Such a thing has never before occurred, since I have been principal of the seminary. The idea of making any one such an elegant present, contrary to my explicit directions, too, on the subject of expensive gifts."

CHAPTER XIV.

CLOSE OF SCHOOL.

ANOTHER year had passed away, and Minnie was to graduate with the highest honors of her class. She and Kate were seated together in the latter's room talking over their plans for the future.

"I wish you would change your mind, Minnie dear, and consent to go home with me yet, after school closes. I have told them so much about you, that they are hardly willing to wait until next fall to see one whom I love so dearly. We are all going to the sea-shore during the hot weather, but I will not

enjoy it half so much if you are not with us."

"No, dear, do not urge me. My friends at the parsonage are expecting me, and I would not disappoint them. Then you know what my plan is for the summer."

"Yes, it is to go back and finish up that term at the district school. But it is my opinion that you will not take it. There's a brighter career than that before you, Minnie."

"You are enthusiastic, Kate. But I must return to the scene of my inglorious failure, and try the experiment over again there, before I can deserve a tithe of your unbounded confidence in me to accomplish great things."

"It will not be necessary for you

to do that, Minnie, I assure you. The goal may be nearer than you think."

"What a dear good friend you have ever been to me, Kate. You have been the means of making my school life here a very bright spot in my memory. How much I have to thank you for."

"Say not so, Minnie. The obligation is far greater on my side. It was you who led me to the dear Saviour. Would anything that I have done for you, compare with the priceless boon you were instrumental in placing within my reach? Your living the gospel, made more impression upon my mind, than all the sermons I ever heard preached. You remember, Minnie, the afternoon you sent me that text, 'Now is the

accepted time, and now is the day of salvation.' That evening, too, you wrote me such an affectionate little note, and enclosed these beautiful lines—

"'There are angels bending low,
Waiting for me to decide,
Shall I love the Lord or no?
Am I on the Saviour's side?
Yes, unfold your snowy wings,
Bear this message to the skies;
I'll give up all lesser things,
For the Lord of Paradise.'

"I was halting between two opinions then, and those three things combined, helped me to decide that very night, whom I would serve."

There was a gentle tap at the door, and one of the teachers looked in to say that Mrs. Howard wished all the young ladies to assemble in

the school hall. And thus the word went from room to room.

After they had gone in and taken their accustomed places, Mrs. Howard walked up the middle aisle, and took her position upon the stage, which had been erected in preparation for the approaching public examination.

There was a buzz among the girls, as she deliberately unfolded a paper she held in her hand. Then they were addressed as follows:

"Young ladies, I have sent for you all, because I see all your signatures attached to this petition. In order that there may be no misunderstanding in regard to its contents, I thought best to have you all present and read it in your hearing." Two or three ineffectual attempts were

made, before Mrs. Howard could command her voice so as to speak distinctly; but she finally proceeded to read the following:

"MRS. HOWARD:—It is the earnest wish of those whose names appear below, to have Miss Minnie Gray made a member of the faculty next session. Will you allow her to fill the vacancy which is to be caused by Miss Tindle's marriage, and much oblige your,

"AFFECTIONATE PUPILS."

"My dear pupils," continued Mrs. Howard, "I presume you are aware that this is rather an unusual method of procedure, in matters connected with the management of institutions of this character. But unprecedented

as your petition is, I take great pleasure in granting your request; and congratulate you upon your good judgment in your selection for principal teacher, though a pupil and now about to graduate, one whom I have every reason to believe will prove a worthy member of the faculty. And be assured, my pupils, that nothing could give me greater pleasure, than to know that it is your unanimous wish, that my niece, Miss Gray, be promoted to the first position in the seminary."

Here was a new discovery.

"Miss Gray, Mrs. Howard's niece!"

There was a perfect outburst of enthusiasm; and for once, Mrs. Howard commanded silence in vain. In a moment, Minnie was hidden from her view, overwhelmed by the con-

gratulations and caresses of the warm-hearted girls.

When order was at length restored, they knelt, and Mrs. Howard offered an impressive prayer. After that, there were no more boisterous demonstrations of affection from the girls. They went one by one to press a kiss upon Minnie's fair brow, then quietly left the hall.

The clattering tongue of the rousing bell, next morning, through the old seminary hall, was a useless sound, for the young ladies were already up and dressed, and the whole house was in commotion. It was examination day.

Those only. who have passed through this trying public ordeal, can fully understand the causes of that feverish excitement, which had

thus seized upon the pupils' minds, at the end of the session. They began to recall many neglected opportunities for improvement. Recollections of imperfectly prepared lessons troubled them. And when this last night had come, their almost sleepless couches were truthful indications of the dread they had, of the anticipated failures of to-morrow. But all passed more successfully than they expected. And the valedictory, read by Minnie Gray, was a masterly production, evincing a bright intellect, and superior scholarship, yet breathing throughout the same gentle Christian spirit, which had ever been the most distinguishing trait of her character. Then, after the delivery of the diplomas to the graduating class,

and the closing exercises were concluded, with tearful eyes, and throbbing hearts, came the farewells, and the partings. For teachers and pupils would soon be scattered to their distant homes, and many of them would never meet again.

CHAPTER XV.

MINNIE'S VACATION.

LATE in the afternoon, on the following Saturday, a heavy vehicle, drawn by a pair of thin, jaded horses, might have been seen slowly ascending a slight hill three miles from B., when one of the horses suddenly stopped.

"Ha! baulked have you? Well I'll teach you better manners for next time," said the driver, and blow after blow from his heavy whip was administered, without producing the slightest effect. Then he fell into a violent passion; and the strokes were interspersed with fearful oaths.

But it was all to no purpose. "Noble," would not budge a single inch.

The angry man quickly jumped down from his seat, put a stone under the wheel, picked up a club, and with flushed face, and flashing eye, had leveled a deadly aim at the offending horse's head, when a hand was laid lightly on his arm, and a gentle voice said,

"Please do not strike him, sir."

He turned fiercely to see who dared thus to interfere. And the blasphemy upon his lips was checked, as he met the look of grieved surprise with which Minnie Gray confronted him.

"Do let the poor animal rest a while. See how tired and exhausted he is. Couldn't he have some water?" pleaded Minnie.

"It isn't water he needs. Nothin' but beatin' and swearin' ever starts old 'Rawbones' when he takes one o' these here spells."

"Do you think swearing helps the matter any?"

"Not much, I s'pose. He's got used to it I reckon, and don't mind it a bit."

"O! why do you do it then? It made me feel so badly when I heard you say those terrible words. The good book tells us, 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.'"

"Yes, Miss, you're right. That's in the Bible sure; for many's the time I've heard my blessed mother read them very words. Howsom-

ever it's been an awful while since I've thought of 'em."

Minnie's gentle tones, and conciliatory manner, turned the door of his heart upon its rusty hinges, and kindlier feelings entered in. He immediately got the bucket, brought water for the horses, patted "Noble" on the back, asked Minnie to please take her seat again, mounted to his own, gathered up his reins, and to his amazement, the horses started off at a brisk pace, and in about half an hour they arrived at B.

Many changes had taken place in the familiar steets during Minnie's long absence.

"Is this really the parsonage!" she exclaimed, as they halted in front of a remodeled dwelling, freshly painted.

"Yes, Miss, the meetin' folks have been fixin' up things here. I kind of thought you wouldn't know it," was the good-natured reply, as the door was being opened and Minnie handed down the steps.

The pastor and his wife appearing on the new verandah, hastened forward to greet her; and Minnie felt that she was at home again.

The coachman meanwhile had removed the baggage, but still he lingered.

"Can I do anything for you, my friend?" inquired Mr. R.

"No, but I'd like to speak to the young lady again if she pleases," he respectfully replied.

Minnie turned towards him.

"I just wanted to tell you, Miss, that I'm much obliged. If it hadn't

been for you, I'd killed that ere horse right on the spot to-day, then what would the 'boss' done to me? I was thinkin' maybe I might do a good turn for you sometime."

"So you can," she answered; "just promise me, will you, not to swear any more, and I will value it more than anything else you could do."

"Indeed I'll try, Miss. I've been considerin' the thing ever since the fuss on the hill yonder. Cause you talked to me like mother used to when she was livin'."

"Do you read any, sir?" asked Minnie.

"Yes'm, I do, when I take a notion; but that's not often."

"Well, here is my little Bible, which I would like to have you take for a keepsake. And you'll find

some places marked in it, that you can read to remember me by."

Oh, thank you, Miss; I'll hunt'em every one up." And the man left Minnie's presence, with higher aims and nobler purposes.

Scarcely two happy weeks had passed away at the parsonage, when one evening Minnie entered the study, looking pale and anxious.

"What troubles you, my child?" the minister kindly inquired. And she silently handed him the following letter, which she had just received from Mrs. Bowers. He took it and read,

"I entreat you, my young friend, by all the love you bear my darling child, to come and spend the rest of your vacation with her. I am seriously alarmed about Kate. She has

not been at all well since she came home from school, and is so low spirited. She being very much attached to you, I feel that your presence here would help to cheer her up. As my brother is out West on business, and expects to be in your place soon, I have requested him to call, and see if you will not come right home with him."

"Now what would you advise me to do? Shall I go to Kate or not?" asked Minnie, in an agitated voice, when Mr. R. had finished.

He seemed lost in thought for a few moments, then replied,

"Much as we would love to keep you with us awhile longer, Minnie, something tells me not to hinder you. Go and carry comfort to the heart of your sick friend, my child."

They had not heard the door bell ring. And at that moment a gentleman was announced, who introduced himself as "Mr. Clifford," Mrs. Bowers' brother, Minnie knew at a glance; for she had often seen "Uncle Charles'" picture in Kate's album.

We pass over the parting next day; and nothing worthy of note occurred during the journey. When the travellers arrived at E., Mrs. Bowers' carriage was at the depot waiting. Mr. Clifford handed Minnie over to the care of the black man, who answered to the title of "Uncle Phineas," then he bade her "good-bye for the present."

The luxurious carriage rolled on over the smooth road, and they soon went through an arched gateway,

that gave entrance to an avenue, which led directly up to Kate's elegant country home.

"I's fetched de young lady wid me, Missus," said "Uncle Phineas," pompously, as he ushered her into the handsomely furnished parlor.

Mrs. Bowers' cordial greeting, and motherly embrace, set Minnie at her ease. She immediately asked about Kate.

"She is sleeping now; I did not tell her that I was expecting you to-day, for fear something might happen to detain you. And disappointment would not be very good for her, I fear, in her present state of health."

"But joy would, mother." And there stood the invalid at the parlor door, looking a little thinner, and a

little paler, than when Minnie parted with her last, but otherwise the same, and attired in the pretty double wrapper she had been in the habit of wearing at the seminary.

"Minnie!"

"Kate!"

And the two friends were folded in each other's arms.

"I thought you were here, Minnie, for I dreamed you had come. So I listened at the top of the stairs, and sure enough I heard your voice."

"Hadn't you better show your friend to her room, my daughter," suggested Mrs. Bowers, and let her have time to refresh herself a little, before you commence one of your long talks?"

"Say our room, please, mother. I've changed my mind about the

guest chamber. I want Minnie with me." And the petted child had her own way.

From the time of Minnie's arrival, new life seemed to be infused into Kate's listless spirit. She had come from school, thinking her education was finished, and she had nothing in the world to do. Hence her apparent illness was really little else than a natural reaction of the brain, which sometimes follows after a period of intense mental application. It was going to sleep for want of its accustomed stimulus, and needed the healthful influence of just such a practical body as Minnie Gray, to arouse it from its dormant state.

"Which way now, my children?" inquired Mrs. Bowers, one morning as the girls were going out.

"Nowhere in particular, only to take a ride," was the smiling reply.

"Then I wish you would drive around by Mrs. Jameson's, and leave this basket for me. The poor woman is sick again, and I must send the family something to eat."

"We'll be happy to do your errand, mother. Be sure and have a good dinner ready for us, when we get back." And the two started off in high glee.

"Don't keep us waiting long, "Uncle Phineas," said Kate, when they had arrived at Mrs. Jameson's.

"No, Miss Kate, I kin tote dis in dar, and be back in 'bout a jiffy," answered "Uncle Phineas," with one of his broadest smiles, as he settled the heavy basket comfortably upon the top of his head, and made

what he considered "a regular bee line," in the direction of the house.

"How many children has this Mrs. Jameson?" inquired Minnie.

"She has seven."

"Do they attend Sabbath-school anywhere?"

"No, I believe not. There is no Sabbath-school nearer than Linden Grove, where we went last Sunday."

"Are there any more poor families in your neighborhood?"

"Yes, there are several, but I don't know much about them. Mrs. Jameson is under our especial care, because she used to live at our house before she married that worthless husband of hers, who died not long ago in a drunken fit. Mother has always taken a great interest in her,

for she had been one of the best of servants."

"Do you ever visit these poor people around you, Kate?"

"No, only Mrs. Jameson's. But what a question, Minnie! Some are so rough, you'd be half afraid to go into their houses, even if you wanted to. We always send them things, though, to make them comfortable, when we know they are in need. And isn't that enough?"

"No, Kate, I believe great good can be accomplished by visiting these lower classes, taking a personal interest in their welfare, and giving them a word of sympathy and encouragement, as well as judiciously administering to their bodily necessities. When people's hearts are pining for affection, Kate,

they may starve even on bread. Then remember the Saviour's words, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.' You should be about your Master's work."

"What can I do, Minnie?"

"What couldn't you do, Kate? You have time, talent, health, and wealth, all at your disposal. Why not gather in these poor neglected children, and establish a kind of mission school, combining intellectual with religious training? I often think of the words that stirred me most, in the closing address, made to our class, 'If you are as faithful to your duties in society, as you have been here, the respective societies where you go will be the better for your presence. To day

you go forth into the world, a band of educated Christian girls. And the world needs you. God has work for you to do. You have been here as soldiers in a training school, now you go forth to the battle.'"

Minnie ceased speaking. The horses' heads were turned, and duing the homeward ride Kate was silent and thoughtful.

CHAPTER XVI.

MINNIE IN HER NEW SPHERE.

WHEN we again take up the broken thread in Minnie's history, we find her at her post as principal teacher, in her Aunt Caroline's seminary, near the close of the second year.

She had entered upon her present duties, with calm deliberation, and a prayerful consideration of the difficulties, in the untried path before her. Two questions, which presented themselves to her mind, were in regard to the girls, who had been pupils with her so recently. Now that the novelty of their proposition

to Mrs. Howard had worn off, and the excitement it caused at the time had died away, would they still wish her to take Miss Tindle's place in the school, and be willing to recognize her authority when placed over them? Had she known how ready these young companions were to acknowledge her superior attainments; how they admired that dignity, which had long since commanded their respect; how they had endeavored to pattern after her cultivated manners, and imitate her gentle courtesy; how they had been attracted by her consistent Christian life; and then had she known the strength of their affection for her, the above named questions, need not have cost her one perplexing thought.

Minnie's talent as a teacher, however, was not destined to shine forth with its brightest lustre, from among the gifted scholars in her classes. The less favored ones, those who had not so much capacity, or facility for receiving and retaining instruction, best reflected its peculiar brilliancy. If the lessons were hard for them to learn, she spared neither time, nor labor, in trying to make them easy. Not always by smoothing away the difficulties; but more frequently by getting them interested—enthusiastic if it were possible—then showing them how to study, the result of which was that they generally mastered their lessons in the end. She made it her chief business to teach students how to help themselves. So it passed

into a proverb, with the others associated with her,

"Have you a stupid pupil, hand her over to Miss Gray, and she will bring her out."

Thus far, Minnie had smoothly sailed upon the high tide of popular favor. Punctual in the discharge of every day duties, faithfully watching for souls, constantly keeping in view the Father's hand, which had kindly guided her through all her wanderings.

On the particular evening of which we write, Minnie had recieved a long, interesting letter from Kate.

"I can hardly realize," she wrote, "that these neat, orderly children who gather around me now, were once the little filthy ragged urchins,

who, two short years ago, I would have fancied had pollution in their very touch. And you could never guess, dear, who my most efficient assistant is, now (I mean in regard to visiting among these people, looking after their sick, and praying with, and for them). No less a personage, than your old friend the stage driver. He left his calling on the highway, with money enough to purchase a bit of land, happened to locate here, and has settled down into one of the most earnest, working christian I ever knew."

As Minnie read these glad tidings, "Father I thank thee," welled up from her overflowing heart.

The bell struck the hour of prayer; and we leave her with the

assembled household around the family altar, her voice blending sweetly with theirs, in the melodious strains of their favorite evening hymn.

"God of our fathers whom we praise,
Our evening song to thee we raise;
O send thy spirit from above,
And bind our hearts in Christian love.

"Before thee at this sacred hour,
Let each one feel thy spirit's power;
Draw us to Christ, the only friend,
And make us His till life shall end.

"Bless us and those we love this night,
Give to our hearts thy holy light;
About our beds thy vigils keep,
And watch where thy beloved sleep.

"O guide us till we reach that shore,
Where night and sorrow are no more,
Where we shall stand before our God
With raiment washed in Jesus' blood."

THE END.